



Department of State **TELEGRAM**

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDS/LB

REVIEWED BY: M. E. [Signature] DATE: 11/1/68
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E.O. 12956 DECL: OADR
TAGG: PREL. HOPS, PINS, PIND, AF, UA, PE, IN
SUBJECT: US MEDIA REPORT OF SOVIET AIR BUILD-UP NEAR
AFGHANISTAN

REF: KABL 0803 ✓

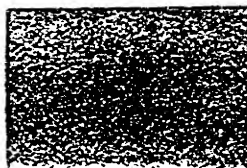
1. WASHINGTON POST CARRIED FOLLOWING STORY ON APRIL 17, BEGIN TEXT: SOVIETS BOLSTER AFGHAN FORCE: BOMBERS NEAR BORDER: THE SOVIET UNION HAS STATIONED ABOUT THREE DOZEN MEDIUM-RANGE BOMBERS AT AIRFIELDS NEAR ITS BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN, PRESAGING A POSSIBLE NEW PHASE IN THE WAR AGAINST AFGHAN GUERRILLAS. ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID YESTERDAY.

U.S. OFFICIALS CAUTIONED THAT THEY ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LAST WEEK'S DEPLOYMENTS, WHICH INCLUDED 36 TU16 BADGER BOMBERS AND ABOUT 100 LIGHTER BOMBERS AND GROUND ATTACK PLANES. THE MOVEMENT COULD BE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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IN THE IRAK-IRAQ WAR, SINCE THE PERSIAN GULF IS WITHIN THE 1,200 MILE RANGE OF THE BADGERS.

BUT THE OFFICIALS SAID THEY BELIEVE THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE PLANES, ACCOMPANIED BY SUPPORT AIRCRAFT AND LARGE AMOUNTS OF MUNITIONS, INDICATES THE SOVIETS MAY BE PLANNING LARGE-SCALE AERIAL BOMBING AS PART OF THEIR EXPECTED SPRING OFFENSIVE IN AFGHANISTAN. HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS HAVE BEEN USED EXTENSIVELY IN THE WAR, BUT UNTIL NOW THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT ENGAGED IN THE KIND OF HIGH-ALTITUDE, WIDESPREAD BOMBING THAT THE UNITED STATES USED IN VIETNAM IN AN EFFORT TO DEMORALIZE THE ENEMY.

THE SOVIET UNION INVADED AFGHANISTAN IN DECEMBER, 1979, AND INSTALLED A FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT. SINCE THEN, MOSLEM "FREEDOM FIGHTERS" IN THE COUNTRYSIDE HAVE STUBBORNLY RESISTED THE SOVIET PRESENCE, FORCING THE SOVIETS TO COMMIT MORE THAN 100,000 TROOPS TO THE MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY AND STATION ANOTHER 30,000 ALONG THE BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN.

THE SOVIETS ALSO APPEAR TO BE FLEXING THEIR MILITARY MUSCLES IN ANOTHER PART OF THE WORLD. PENTAGON OFFICIALS SAID YESTERDAY. TWICE IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE SOVIET NAVY HAS STAGED AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS ON THE VIETNAMESE COAST, THE FIRST TIME SOVIET MARINES HAVE OPERATED IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD, THEY SAID.

A PENTAGON OFFICIAL SAID THE AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISES ARE ANOTHER INDICATION, FOLLOWING THE DEPLOYMENT OF A HELICOPTER CARRIER TO THE CARIBBEAN, OF THE SOVIETS' WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO PROJECT FORCE FAR
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FROM ITS BORDERS.

THE MOST RECENT EXERCISE, ABOUT 90 MILES SOUTH OF HAIPHONG, INVOLVED A 14,000-TON IVAN ROGOV CLASS AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT SHIP, THE 30,000-TON HELICOPTER CARRIER KIEV, SEVERAL SUPPORT SHIPS AND 400 TO 500 SOVIET MARINES.

"THE SOVIET UNION, FOR DECADES A CONTINENTAL MILITARY POWER, NOW POSSESSES AN INCREASED CAPABILITY TO TRANSPORT

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PERSONNEL, ARMS AND EQUIPMENT TO ANY AREA OF THE WORLD," THE PENTAGON SAID LAST WEEK IN ITS LATEST EDITION OF "SOVIET MILITARY POWER."

CRITICS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THE PENTAGON EXAGGERATES SOVIET CAPABILITIES TO HELP CONVINCE CONGRESS TO APPROPRIATE LARGE SUMS FOR U.S. DEFENSE. MANY OF THOSE CRITICS ACKNOWLEDGE, HOWEVER, THAT SOVIET "POWER PROJECTION" HAS INCREASED IN RECENT YEARS.

IN AFGHANISTAN, ONE DEFENSE OFFICIAL SAID, THERE HAD BEEN INDICATIONS EVEN BEFORE THE DEPLOYMENT OF BORDER AIRCRAFT THAT THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE PLANNING "A LITTLE TOUGHER" SPRING OFFENSIVE THIS YEAR. "THEY MAY JUST BE GETTING TIRED OF IT," THE OFFICIAL SAID, NOTING THAT THE SOVIETS ARE ESTIMATED TO BE SPENDING \$1 MILLION EACH DAY AND TO HAVE LOST SEVERAL HUNDRED HELICOPTERS.

BUT ANOTHER OFFICIAL SAID THERE WAS SOME DOUBT ABOUT THE 'SEFULNESS OF AERIAL BOMBING, SINCE THE GUERRILLAS DO NOT CONCENTRATE IN LARGE GROUPS. THE BADGERS WERE DEPLOYED ALONG WITH ABOUT 76 SUIT FITTERS, GROUND ATTACK FIGHTERS ROUGHLY COMPARABLE TO THE U.S. A7 CORSAIR, AND ABOUT 60 SU24 FENCERS, WHICH COMPARE WITH U.S. F105 FIGHTER-BOMBERS. END TEXT.

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2. FOLLOWING PRESS GUIDANCE WAS USED AT NOON PRESS BRIEFING APRIL 17. BEGIN TEXT: AFGHANISTAN: SOVIET BUILD-UP ALONG BORDER:

3. DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ABOUT THE WASHINGTON POST STORY THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS INCREASING THE NUMBER OF ITS BOMBERS AT AIRFIELDS NEAR ITS BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN?

A. -- IN AFGHANISTAN, THERE GENERALLY IS A WINTER LULL IN THE FIGHTING BETWEEN SOVIET AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN FORCES AND THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE, WHICH HAS DONE VERY WELL IN KEEPING THE SOVIETS FROM ACHIEVING THEIR OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN.

-- THE SOVIETS CONTROL THEIR MILITARY BASES AND MAJOR TRANSPORTATION ROUTES, AND HOLD THE BALANCE OF POWER IN

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THE MAJOR CITIES, ESPECIALLY KABUL, BUT THE RESISTANCE CONTROLS ABOUT 75 OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, AND OPERATES IN ALL CITIES, EXERCISING SIGNIFICANT CONTROL OVER SOME.

-- USUALLY AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, THE PACE OF THE FIGHTING PICKS UP THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, BUT SO FAR WE HAVE HAD NO CONFIRMATION THAT MAJOR OFFENSIVES OR OPERATIONS HAVE BEGUN. CERTAINLY, GIVEN THE SOVIETS' LACK OF SUCCESS AGAINST THE RESISTANCE OR MUJAHIDIN, ONE MIGHT EXPECT THEM TO TRY NEW TACTICS SUCH AS THE HIGH-ALTITUDE BOMBING DESCRIBED IN TODAY'S REPORT. THIS WOULD BE AN ESCALATION OF DESTRUCTIVE ANTI-CIVILIAN SOVIET WARFARE. DURING 1983 WE NOTED THAT THE SOVIETS USED INCREASINGLY BRUTAL TACTICS AGAINST CIVILIAN TARGETS IN AREAS SUSPECTED OF STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE RESISTANCE AND OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE.

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-- THE MAJOR POINT IS THAT THE STRUGGLE IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES UNABATED. THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO DEFEAT THE RESISTANCE, AND THEY MAY BE CONSIDERING NEW MILITARY TACTICS. MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE IN AFGHANISTAN HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED TO ACHIEVE A NEGOTIATED POLITICAL SETTLEMENT FOR AFGHANISTAN TO GET THE SOVIET FORCES OUT AND TO END THE TORRENT OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE. THIS REMAINS THE GOAL OF THE UNITED STATES' POLICY.

SOVIET AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISES IN VIETNAM

Q. AN APRIL 17 WASHINGTON POST STORY ON THE SOVIET BUILD-UP IN AFGHANISTAN QUOTED PENTAGON OFFICIALS AS SAYING THAT IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE SOVIET NAVY HAS STAGED AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS ON THE VIETNAMESE COAST, THE FIRST TIME THAT THE SOVIET MARINES HAVE OPERATED IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD. THE ARTICLE SAID THAT THE MOST RECENT EXERCISE INVOLVED 400-500 SOVIET MARINES WELL AS AN ASSAULT SHIP AND HELICOPTER CARRIER. CAN YOU COMMENT?

A. WE HAVE EXPRESSED OUR CONCERN SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST FEW YEARS ABOUT THE GROWING SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, PARTICULARLY IN VIETNAM, WHERE THE SOVIET BUILD-UP CONTINUES. VIETNAM DEPENDS

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OVERWHELMINGLY ON THE SOVIET UNION FOR MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, IN EXCESS OF \$1 BILLION PER YEAR, AND HAS IN TURN PROVIDED THE SOVIETS AN IMPORTANT FACILITY AT CAN RANH BAY FOR PROJECTING SOVIET MILITARY POWER INTO SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE INTRODUCTION OF SOVIET AMPHIBIOUS FORCES INTO VIETNAM FOR THE FIRST TIME ADDS TO THE SOVIET'S DESTABILIZING INFLUENCE IN THE REGION. KABUL MINIMIZE CONSIDERED. DAM

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